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CHAPTER I

THE KOL TRIBE OF CENTRAL INDIA

DISTRIBUTION AND STRENGTH OF THE TRIBE. The Kol tribe, with which this monograph deals, is one of the primitive tribes of Central India. The Central India area, in which they are found, may be described as a triangle with the Nerbudda and the Son rivers for its hypotenuse, having for one of its sides the valley of the Ganges and, for the other, the Chambal river and the Chitor hills. The Kol tribe occupies the north-eastern part of this area. While individual members may be considerably scattered the bulk of the Kols is found in the north of the Central Provinces; in Rewa State, which is included in the Central India Agency; and in the southern portions of the United Provinces adjoining Rewa State. The main centre of distribution for the Kols is Rewa State and the Kols of Central Provinces look back to Rewa as their homeland. The accompanying map of India shows the distribution of the Kols¹. It will be seen that they belong to the highlands at the northern end of the peninsula. They live among the Vindhya mountains and in the Kaimur hills. These mountains have played an important part in the cultural and ethnological history of India. In early days, before the forests were denuded and the roads cut through, they were an effective barrier to the movements of people. They have been traditionally associated with the southernmost limits of Aryan influence. There is good evidence that they have sheltered some of the oldest races in India since the dawn of history.

The tribe itself should be carefully distinguished from the Munda tribes of Chota Nagpur which are frequently called Kols in the generic sense. There is no specific Kol tribe in that area, although there is a group called the Larka Kols, or Hos, famous for an insurrection in the year 1832, and a part of the district of Singhbhum is called the Kolhan after them. Mention of the specific Kol tribe is made only in the Census Reports of the Central India Agency and that for the Central Provinces. In the United Provinces the Kols are classed as an exterior caste.

The Kols stand second in strength among the Munda tribes of the Central Provinces. According to the 1931 Census the Korkus are first with 176,616 and the Kols follow with 91,556. Among all the tribes in the province the Kols stand eighth in numerical strength. In the Central Provinces as a whole the Census Reports give the following figures for the Kol tribe:

¹ Figure 1, p. 2.

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Year	Total	"Hindus"	"Animists"
1891	87,000	No record	No record
1901	65,043	Do.	Do.
1911	82,598	58,679	23,819
1921	96,593	92,117	4,476
1931	91,556	75,757	15,799
1941	93,944	No record	No record

According to the 1931 Census Report the majority of the Kols found in the Central Provinces is living in the Jubbulpore division, and numbers 57,827, of which only 84 persons returned themselves as adhering to Tribal Religions.

In the Central India Agency the Census Report of the Kol population is as follows. The figures from earlier Census Reports are incomplete :

Year	Total	"Hindus"	"Animists"
1921	163,000	..	..
1931	200,249	193,526	6,723
1941	32,076	..	..

The Rewa State in the Central India Agency is the home of the Kols according to their own belief. Of the 200,000 Kols in the Central India Agency, the 1931 report showed that 175,391 were found in Rewa State, and of this number only 861 returned themselves as other than Hindu. The report for Central India in 1931 says that there had been a tendency in the past to classify all aboriginal tribes as 'Gonds,' but that this tendency was carefully checked and adjusted in this report.¹

In the United Provinces bordering Rewa State, Kols are found in considerable numbers. The figures are as follows, and in the Report no distinction is made in regard to tribal religions : all were returned as Hindu and the group treated as an exterior caste :

Year	Total	Year	Total
1891	68,556	1921	68,941
1901	49,653	1931	76,848
1911	65,647	1941	76,737

These are limited practically to three districts : Mirzapur, with some 38,000 ; Allahabad with 26,000 and Banda with 11,000. The increase over 1921, which amounts to 11.5% is ascribed to immigration from Rewa State. In the United Provinces Report the Kols are treated as an external or depressed class ; elsewhere they are uniformly treated as a forest tribe.

¹ Census of India, 1931, xi:1, p. 217. But the 1941 figures show that a new method of classification was followed. At the time of printing the explanation was not available.

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Considering India as a whole the Census Reports give the following figures for the Kols :

Year	Total			
1881 ..	57,420			
1891 ..	143,551			
1901 ..	105,474			
1911 ..	148,243	(Including 23,819 'Animists')		
1921 ..	328,245	Do.	9,944	Do.
1931 ..	368,653	Do.	22,522	Do.
1941 ..	202,757			

ORIGIN OF THE KOLS : GENERAL : HISTORICAL DATA. In recent years there has been an active interest in the study of the origin of tribe and race in India. There are still vast fields to be explored, since much mystery surrounds the movements of races in India. This is just as true of the Munda group to which the Kols belong. Mr. Sarat Chandra Roy in his book *The Mundas and Their Country* published in 1912, was one of the first to make a serious study of the traditions of the tribes of Chota Nagpur concerning their origins. He does not find that their oral traditions throw much light upon the name or location of their original home.

One of the legends collected by Roy suggests the place of origin as *Sava Sandi Bir*—'the vast desolate forest.' This vague terminology makes it difficult, if not impossible, to identify any specific locality. It may refer in general to the Highlands of Central India, or even to the dense jungle that is said to have covered parts of the Gangetic Valley. Roy also points out that the Cosmogonic legend of the Munda tribe names a place called *Ajabgarh*—a place first raised out of the primeval ocean, where Sing Bonga, the Supreme deity of the Munda group in Chota Nagpur, created the first parents of the Munda tribe. Roy holds that this idea was probably borrowed from the Hindus and then mixed up with some of the current Munda legends¹. The Kols of Central India seem to know nothing, or have heard nothing, about Sing Bonga.

Sir William Crooke, in his article on the Kol tribe, gives us the following legendary information². A certain King, Yayati, fifth King of the Lunar race, divided his empire among his five sons. According to the Harivansa, the children of Yayati's son Turuvaasu settled in the south. The tenth generation (from, and including

¹ *Ibid.*, 1:2, pp. 622, 623.

² Roy, Sarat Chandra, *The Mundas and Their Country*, p. 12.

³ Crooke, W., *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh*, Vol. III, pp. 296, 296.

CHAPTER VI

THE SOCIAL UNIT: THE FAMILY

THE KOL FAMILY. The basis of Kol society is found in the family. This family is patrilinear and patrilocal, with a recognition of the bilateral kinship group because important social relations are observed with the kin on both sides. Nevertheless the household usually contains only dependent members from the father's side, but there are no taboos for the other side of the family and visiting is allowed back and forth freely and without hindrance. No trace was found of a rupture in the parent-in-law relationship and no restrictions either in talking or associating were traced. In all, however, the family stands out as a distinct unit separate from the wider life of the community. 59 596 [574] [606]

In a typical Kol family under the one roof will usually be found the husband, the wife (or wives), unmarried children, and occasionally some dependent member or members of the father's family, such as a widowed grandparent. Soon after marriage the Kol son usually sets up a home for himself. In the more primitive sections it is unusual to find a married son and his wife living with his parents. In the more Hinduized communities, where the Kols are better off and can afford more elaborate houses, married sons and their wives were frequently found living with the boy's parents. In one such home in Barela, for example, there were two married sons and their wives living with the boys' parents. This seems though to be an imitation of the Hindu family system, rather than a true Kol institution. The older dependents are found in the house only if their own homes are broken up by death. One occasionally finds an old couple living together in a little hut, and when one or the other dies the surviving member goes to live in a son's or another relative's house. In one centre, however, four such persons were found, each living alone in a little hut. They were either not wanted or had no relatives with whom they could reside. 184 511 596 [177] 596

In Barela and Kharara Ghat a survey was made of the number of people in each home or sheltered under one roof. The average number of people per house, excluding four houses where there was one each who was somehow *persona non grata* with relatives, was 3.9. In Kharara Ghat the average came to 4.8 persons per house. The 1931 Central Provinces Census Report reveals that primitive tribes average 3.8 children per family. The distribution of people was as follows: 592 162

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1. *Barela*: Persons reported: Houses reporting: Total for class.

9	..	1	..	9
8	..	2	..	16
7	..	1	..	7
6	..	5	..	30
5	..	10	..	50
4	..	8	..	32
3	..	16	..	48
2	..	12	..	24
1	..	4	..	4
		59	..	220

2. *Kharara Ghat*:

9	..	2	..	18
8	..	..	..	..
7	..	2	..	14
6	..	5	..	30
5	..	6	..	30
4	..	6	..	24
3	..	4	..	12
2	..	4	..	8
		29	..	136

[177] In the case of the Barela Kols the lower average is due to two causes: the first is that the town is near the main road and as the Kols are much more Hinduized as a community there is a natural loss of household members who leave home for work in Jubbulpore. The second is that the health of the Barela Kols is far less satisfactory than of those in Kharara Ghat, for the town is much more open to infection, and illnesses are more numerous.

562 THE POSITION OF WOMEN. The place of women among the Kols can be said to be fairly high. There is a wholesome sense of equality among the sexes. The women do not keep themselves in seclusion [177] (*parda*), and are generally free to go about on any errand. In Hinduized sections they cover their heads in the presence of men or when they are outside their houses, but under primitive conditions they are not [593] so particular. In a general sense the husband is the main authority

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CHAPTER VII

DEATH AND ITS ATTENDANT CEREMONIES

761 Death is an event which every Kol knows must be faced relatively early in life. One does not find a high proportion of aged Kols. Among many primitive people death is usually ascribed to evil influences, but among the Kols this does not seem to be the common belief. While they believe that some deaths may be ascribed to evil influences they do not believe that all are caused that way. On the whole they take quite a natural view of the phenomenon. What the gods will that they do. Death also may be due only to natural causes or carelessness and no hidden malevolent cause is assumed. Death is usually deserved, for as one sows he also reaps. Hence an early death may be justly merited and caused by corrupt living. The Kols do not seem to be as superstition ridden as many groups are, yet we found [771] indications that they hold the general local village point of view. On the whole there is a wholesome attitude toward the supernatural—the world is not altogether evil.

763 THE APPROACH OF DEATH. When it is clear that a person is about to die there are certain things which ought to be done. It was found that the custom of bringing a cow to the bedside of the dying man is known and is occasionally practiced. The dying man is asked to take [825] hold of her tail. This will help him to get to heaven, for the cow is now [782] considered an offering to God, and it is held that by holding the tail the dying man makes this offering. If available, he is also made to drink a [571] little Ganges water which is regarded as the very best of drinks to give him [778] at that hour. Failing this, a sip of water in which gold has been washed [823] is efficacious. Gold is considered an incarnation of God and a symbol of [824] purity. Again, some ordinary water into which some ground up leaves of the *lulasi* plant (*Ocimum sanctum*) have been thrown is advantageous. Such drinks are said to purify the dying person and prepare the soul for its flight to other worlds. Hindu influences are apparent.

Usually the person who is dying is placed on the ground to expire. The body is placed on the ground so that there may be close contact with Mother Earth. In some places it is said that a man may just as well die

• [162] 1 This holds for primitive tribes in general, although any statement of ego is [171] unreliable. The 1931 census figures show that among the Kols there were only 100 men and 99 women per mile over forty. Other tribes show the following: Gond 184 men and 188 women; Maria 106 and 97; Baiga 143 and 146. Hindus rank higher—171 and 173 for Brahmans and 196 and 193 for Kumbha. *Census of India, 1931, xii: 1, p. 131.*

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CHAPTER XII

LIFE STORIES OF LIVING KOIS

SUNNULAL : A KOI WHO STAYED IN HIS VILLAGE

I was born in the village of Kharara Ghat and was the youngest of five brothers. There were also three sisters in my family, which was a large one, as there are about fifty living relatives on my father's side alone. When I was about sixteen years of age my parents decided that I should be married and they found a girl for me in the village of Barela. My wife and I have lived happily together, and we have had two sons. My father died two years ago (in 1935). I have never had to leave Kharara Ghat in order to earn money. I have always seemed to be able to find things to do about the village and have earned enough to be well supplied with the things I need. One thing I do is to go into the forest and cut wood which I carry on my head to Jubbulpore. It is hard work, but it has to be done. My wife and sons also help out by gathering *tendu* leaves for the *biri* manufacturers. All of my five brothers live here in Barela. Together we control about fifteen acres of land which is rented from a *malguzar*. It is not all in one place, but in three or four places. We all do our share of work on this, and the income from the wheat and pulse is shared evenly by us. But all the money I make from selling wood, or grass, or *tendu* leaves I keep myself and we do not share it.

I have become one of the *panchayat* of this village and take a keen interest in the welfare of this village and our community. I would like you to put a school in our village. The nearest school is four miles away—too far for our small children to go even if we were sure they would be treated right if they were admitted. I can read a little and sign my name. I never went to school, but learned this from a man in Jubbulpore, who used to teach me after I had sold my wood. I even have bought some books.

I have no debts and do not drink any strong liquors. I have never been seriously ill, nor had any serious trouble in the family, nor have we suffered from the want of food and clothing. I have never had an accident either even though I have gone on hunting expeditions in charge of beaters. Very often some Europeans from Jubbulpore come out to our village which is close to good hunting places and I go with them and show them where they may find game.

872 EDUCATION AND LITERACY. There does not seem to be any active interest in education on the part of the Kols. In most of the centres visited no Kol children were being sent to school. Of course many of the places were far from the nearest village school. In Barela, however, there is a good school, but of the 125 children of school age among the Kols only two were in this school. We asked the master about these children and he said they were below the average. There are six or seven Kols in Barela who have at one time been in school but not all of them have retained their literacy. Of this number one had read up to the seventh standard and we tried to get from him in writing some facts concerning the Kols, but his responses were very poor and did not give us the insight that we had hoped to get from him. In some places Kols say that they would send their children to school if there were such facilities at hand; but where they are actually at hand they do not take an active interest, and say they cannot afford to spend money on education. There are always one or two families, however, who seem to be interested and who make some attempt to educate their children in the primary schools. In Katni the Church Missionary Society has a school which is situated near one of the sections where Kols live and to which quite a number of Kols have gone at one time or another. There were, however, only sixteen on the list that had done credible work in the past eight years, three of whom had read through the fourth standard. In such schools there is no caste distinction, though in a few other places Kols told us that the schools made distinctions and that their children were not allowed to study with the caste children.

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212 The Census reports reveal that as a group the Kols are among the most illiterate of the many castes and tribes. For India as a whole the report¹ shows that out of 122,695 Kols aged seven years and over there were only 301 literate persons: 290 men and 11 women. Seven of the men were reported as being literate in English. In the Central Provinces and Berar with 48,500 Hindu Kols and 10,813 Tribal Kols there were but 216 and 6 literates respectively. The proportion in the United Provinces is still less as out of 63,382 Kols only 79 were literate. The United Provinces Census Report² puts the Kols 89th in the order of literacy in a list of 95 tribes and castes. It is worked out in that Report that they are 0.24% literate as far as males are concerned and 0.01% for the females. In the Central India Agency out of 151,718 Kols there were 88 males and 50 females literate and two were literate in English. Outside of Rewa State it appears that

¹ Census of India, 1931, I: 1, p. 450.
² Ibid. XVIII: 2, literacy tables.

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there are but three literate Kols in the Central India Agency¹. It is a well known fact that the illiteracy of the lower groups is a source of much hardship to them as it leads to frauds of various kinds at their expense. 162
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In respect of literacy the Kols do not compare favourably with other tribes and castes. The number of literates per thousand works out, in the case of Kol males, to just under five. For the Kayasths it is 607, the Brahmins 437, Oraons 35, Doms 16, Bhils 11 and Chamars 10. This figure of five in the case of the Kol is also lower, according to the report, than the figure of the Munda groups in Bihar and Orissa returned by the Census of 1931².

In the Central Provinces' Report a special subsidiary table of literacy of castes is given both for 1921 and 1931³. The average literacy for Central Provinces was 51 per mille in 1931: 93 per mille in the case of the males and 9 in the case of the females. The respective figures for 1921 were 42, 76 and 7, which would indicate some advances. On this table the Kols as a whole have a literacy of 4 per mille: for the males it is 7 and for the females nil. In 1921 the respective figures were 2 and 4. Taking all the groups listed, and there are seventy tribes and castes selected, there are only three who rank in literacy below the Kols of the Central Provinces: Wadder and Bhil with 3 each and Korku with 2, while two other tribes, Bharias and non-Christian Oraons, rank the same as the Kols with 4 per mille. The Kol thus ranks among the most-illiterate groups of the provinces.

OCCUPATIONS OF THE KOLS. Census reports of the Central Provinces have interesting discussions of occupations. The report for 1931 shows that in the province as a whole 776 persons per 1,000 workers were engaged in the exploitation of animals and vegetables. Industry comes second with only 92 per 1,000. In the lists of occupations of selected groups we find the following of the Kol tribe: 463

Kol Tribe	Number per 1,000 earners engaged in each occupation
Agriculturalists ..	160
Field labourers, wood-cutters, etc.	560
Raisers of livestock, milkmen, herds- men ..	17

¹ *Ibid.* XX:2, literacy tables.

² *Ibid.* I:1, p. 342.

³ *Ibid.* XII:1, p. 200.

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Rs. 4-8-0 per 1,000 tiles molded and put on the rack to harden. They told us that the average Kol worker would mold about 1,000 tiles per week. [464 434 333]

In Panagar there are about 100 families of Kols. Some of them keep chickens and sell the few eggs they get in the local bazaar, or even take them to Jubbulpore on market days. Three or four own bullock carts. The rest of the community divide their time between working on the roads and doing coolie work in the fields when such work is available. This brings them from two to three annas per day. This work is far from steady, being largely seasonal. [443 493 422]

In Benda village there are fifteen houses of Kols. Their main work is breaking stone for the metalled roads and preparing limestone for the kilns. They believe that by steady work they can make up to Rs. three per week, but the work is very hard and the hours are long. A few collect *tendu* leaves in season and when other work is slack they go out to the jungles and cut wood. They can earn from three to three and a half annas per day in that way. None of the Benda Kols does any farming.

At Salavara village on the Gaur River, we found that all were engaged in breaking stones for road metal. Their report seemed to indicate that they had to work harder for what they got than some other groups. They said it took them fifteen days to break a *sai kara*—a stone measuring approximately 1,000 cubic feet—that two men were required and that they received Rs. 2-8-0 for the *sai kara*. Five years ago, they said, they got Rs. 4/- for the same measure. They claim that the work is also harder now as they have to go further for suitable rock.

At Garha close to Jubbulpore, there is a fair-sized Kol community. The village is quite distinct from any other place and about 100 Kol families dwell there. Their occupations are various, and but few have steady work. This group consists mostly of coolies who get work wherever it is available or where the best wages are offered. Sawing wood is a common opening as they do not live far from the timber yards where all the sawing of planks is done by hand. During the wheat harvest they are nearly all away in the fields, leaving their houses empty for the few weeks of the harvesting season. [361 162]

On a preliminary visit to Rewa State we went to a small Kol community not far from Rewa City. These Kols have considerable land for which they pay rental to a Mahratta landlord. What this group told us has been confirmed by many others, both in and out of Rewa State and seems to characterize the conditions of the Kols there. One informant told us that he was married about twelve years pre- [566 426 124 427]

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[124] viously, at which time he incurred a debt of Rs. fourteen for the expenses of the wedding. This was borrowed from a *Thakur* of a nearby village who appeared most glad to lend it to him. Ever since that day this *Thakur* has considered him as his serf, and he is supposed to go daily to him; and even though he has worked for the *Thakur* for the past twelve years he has not cleared the debt and does not believe that he ever will. He is virtually a slave of this man, is on call at any time, and must give him the first work until he no longer requires him. For each day's work the *Thakur* will give him 1½ *seers* of *chana* (usually *Dolichos lablab*) or perhaps the same amount of barley still in the head. Money was never given, nor rice or wheat. This group of Kols in Rewa was a very intelligent one on the whole, but indicated that Rewa State was not a place where one could get more than just the necessary food. As one expressed it: "In Rewa there is no stomach hunger, only money hunger." This appeared to be quite a common expression over a wide area. Food was available there, but no money for the other necessities of life nor for weddings, burials and the like.

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434 In centres like Kymore and Katni where there are large cement works, the majority of the coolies employed in the many types of manual labour are Kols. The work is very hard and the wages are low: usually not more than four annas a day for males and three annas for female workers.

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[423] Kharara Ghat, the isolated Kol village, is perhaps as independent economically as any Kol group studied by us. It was previously noted that this village controls about eighty acres of land. They say that ordinarily they do not sell the farm products, rather keeping them for the use of the village as well as holding a small reserve for emergencies. The village contains about 135 adult persons and the land farmed takes care of their food. Money for other needs is gained in many ways: during the months of May and June the leaves of the *tendu* tree (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) are picked for use in the *biri* manufacture. The leaves are gathered in the early morning or the evenings, and in the heat of the day the people sit under the trees or on the verandas of their houses and arrange the leaves in bundles of one hundred each, tying them with fibre. These bundles are then sold to contractors at the rate of four annas per hundred bundles. Prices vary somewhat according to the quality and the demand. The Kharara Ghat folk claim that they earn from Rs. 400 to 500 per year from the sale of these leaves.

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313 Kharara Ghat has other sources of income. The village is situated on a jungle section on the edge of the reserved forest. Wood is